



Transporta nelaimės
gadījumū un incidentu
izmeklēšanas birojs



Simplified report Nr. 2-2024

**Serious injury of crew member on board of Lithuanian
flagged fishing vessel TOVE on 19 May 2024 in Baltic Sea**

2024



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Preamble

The sole objective of the investigation of an accident shall be the prevention of future accidents through the ascertainment of its causes and circumstances. It shall not be the purpose of an investigation to determine liability nor to apportion blame. The information provided in the report is not intended to be used in legal proceedings.

Transport Accidents and Incidents Investigation Bureau (hereinafter-TAIIB), received information from the Latvian Coast Guard concerning the injury of a crew member on board the Lithuanian-flagged fishing vessel TOVE on 19 May 2024 approximately at 20.15, when crew member had been heavily injured during works on deck by moving parts of a fishing gear and subsequently has been evacuated by Lithuanian SAR helicopter to Ventspils hospital. Acting with the endorsement of the Lithuanian Transport Accident and Incident Investigation Division, the TAIIB has taken the lead in the safety investigation of this accident (EU Directive 2009/18/EC).



Image 1. Vessel TOVE

List of abbreviations

Table 1

EEZ	Exclusive economic zone
LT	Local Time
MRCC	Maritime rescue coordination centre
SAR	Search and Rescue
SMS	Safety management system
TAIIB	Transport accident and Incident Investigation Bureau

1. Short Description of the Casualty

On 19 May 2024 around 20.15 (LT) fishing vessel TOVE was executing routine working operations of fishing in Latvian EEZ, at some 20 nm from Latvian coast in vicinity of port of Ventspils. While heaving trawl with catch from water onboard of the vessel using stern hydraulic winch, a deckhand was seriously injured after being pressed between trawl rope (under weight of catch overboard) and vessel's stern bulwark. Heaving of trawl was immediately stopped and first medical aid was provided immediately. Assistance had been requested from MRCC Riga, and around 21.00 (LT) the Latvian naval ship P-07 VIESITE arrived on scene and berthed to TOVE. Latvian paramedic has provided medical aid with consequent decision of MRCC to execute medical evacuation operation with the involvement of Lithuanian SAR helicopter, which has delivered injured deckhand to Ventspils Hospital. Deckhand suffered serious chest trauma, that required long recovery period.

2. Facts

Accident basic data are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Vessel's name	TOVE
IMO number	5362087
Call sign	LYSF
Flag state	Lithuania
General measurements	Gross Tonnage 296 tons; Length overall 33.07 m; Width 6.70 m, Main engine 485 kW
Ship owner / operator	AB "BANGINIS"
Vessel built / hull material	1961/ steel
Minimum safety crewing	4 persons
Vessel's type	Fishing vessel
Voyage from-to	n/a
Voyage segment	Transit at open sea, fishing
Cargo	n/a
Crew	6 persons
Accident data	
Accident severity/description	Serious accident/heavy chest trauma
Date and time of accident	19 May 2024; about 20.15 (LT)
Accident coordinates	App: Latitude 57° 25.00' N; Longitude 20° 38.00 E
Weather conditions	Calm weather/slight wind; +18° C; daylight
Location onboard	Stern deck/stern bulwark

Vessel's operational activities during the accident	Transit-open Sea. Fishing. Operating with fishing gear. Heaving trawl with catch onboard by means of hydraulic winches (stern winch, waist deck winch)
Human factors data	Possible factors: 1. Insufficient crew situational awareness before commencing works with gear; 2. Miscommunication of orders when operating fishing gear/winches; 3. Mistakes while operating fishing gear/wires
Consequences (for people, ship, cargo, environment, other)	One crew member suffered severe chest trauma, as result: long lasting recovery and medical rehabilitation was required
Shore authority involvement and emergency response	
Involved authorities	Latvian Coast Guard, Lithuanian Coast Guard Ventspils Hospital
Involved units and resources	Arrival of Latvian Coast Guard Ship P-07, Latvian Emergency medical service's ambulance team
Speed of response	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ship P-07 has arrived to TOVE for rendering medical assistance within 45 minutes upon the accident; 2. Lithuanian SAR helicopter has arrived 2hours 05 minutes after the accident for injure crew member's medical evacuation; 3. Lithuanian SAR helicopter has delivered injured crew member to Ventspils Hospital after 2hours 40 minutes after the accident;
Actions taken	Medical evacuation of injured crew member from TOVE within appr. 3 hours (vessel-to hospital) since accident has happened
Results achieved	Injured seafarer was delivered to hospital

3. Narrative

On May 19, 2024, the fishing vessel TOVE was fishing at open sea within the Latvian EEZ, in the vicinity of the port of Ventspils, operating a pelagic trawl.

Five crew members were operating the gear on deck: two deckhands on the stern, and three on the waist deck. The injured deckhand was working at the stern on the port side during the trawl lifting procedure, with the duty to disconnect the port-side otter board, then, in sequence, to connect the trawl headline wire to the winch by means of junction wire connectors. The winch was operated from the bridge, pulling the trawl with catch closer to the vessel's stern. When the trawl was still in the water and was pulled in order to bring it closer to the vessel, the Master turned the vessel to port to take proper vessel position in relation to the sea current, as needed for efficient trawl lifting operation. As a result of the manoeuvre, the trawl wire came under strong tension from the weight of the catch overboard.

The injured crew member was standing between the wire and the stern bulwark, with the task to control the wire tension and direction during the hauling process. After the vessel's port-side turn, the wire became taut under the weight of the catch and pressed the crew member between the wire and the bulwark, causing severe chest injuries. Deck works were immediately suspended, and first aid was provided on scene at 20:15 (LT). The accident was reported to MRCC Riga by VHF radio (Channel 16) at 21:00 (LT). The Latvian Coast Guard ship P-07 VIESITE arrived alongside TOVE at 21:45 (LT), and a paramedic provided further medical assistance. After assessment of the seriousness of the injuries, a decision was made to call a Lithuanian SAR helicopter, which carried out the medical evacuation of the injured deckhand to Ventspils Hospital.

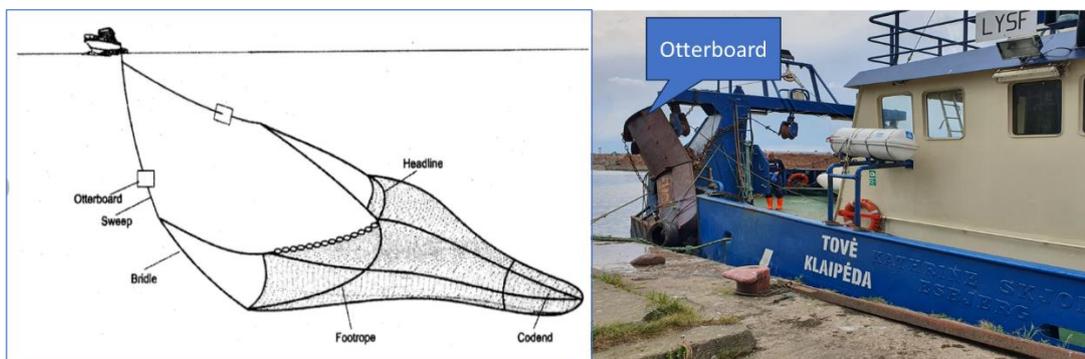


Image 2. Pelagic trawl in action (schematic visualisation) as used onboard of TOVE with otter board fastened in sailing position

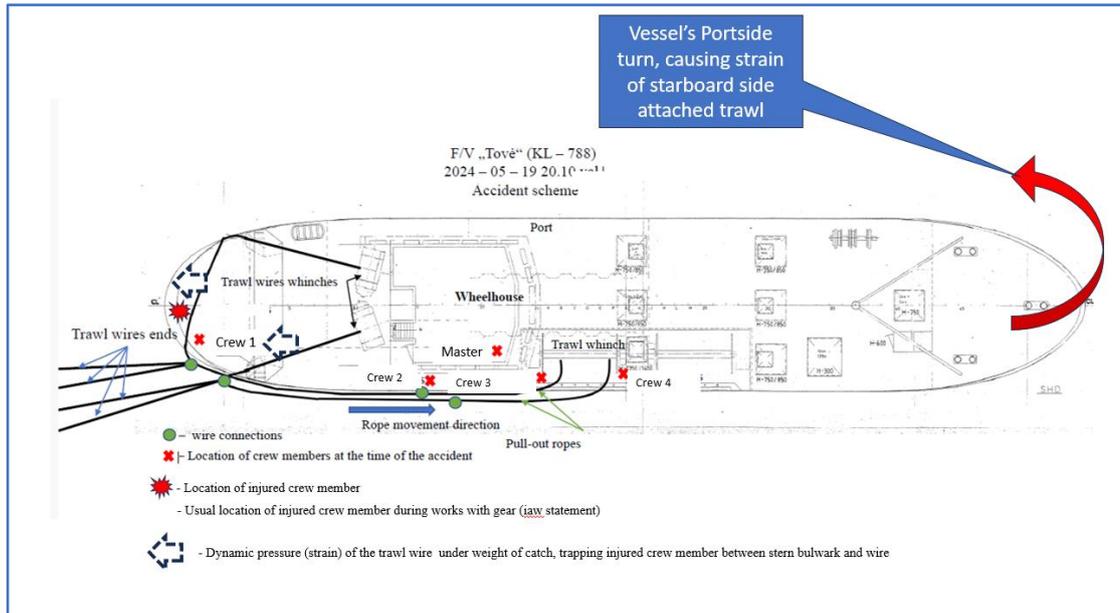


Image 3. Location of crew members on TOVE deck during operations with trawl



Image 4. App location of injured crew member onboard of TOVE at the time of accident (illustrative photo)

4. Analysis

4.1. Operations with the fishing gear onboard of TOVE

The trawl net is deployed from the stern of the vessel, with floats at the top and weights at the bottom to maintain its vertical opening. Angled boards, known as otter boards or “trawl doors”, attached to the sides, hold the net open horizontally (see Image 1).

Standard operations with fishing gear (trawl) consist of three phases and can be broken down into three basic sub-operations:

A. Launching of the trawl out by means of stern winches and towing it for catching fish in the pelagic water profile. Ensuring that the net is properly spread and buoyed for effective fishing. Running the trawl at the target depth, while maintaining appropriate speed and vessel course in relation to local current and wind.

B. Winching the net back onboard, first closer to the vessel's stern, then transferring the trawl wire / headwire under dynamic pressure from the weight of the catch from the stern winch to the waist deck winch for further catch processing.

C. Retrieving the catch onboard by means of the waist deck winch; the catch is gradually transferred from the trawl (net) to the vessel's holding tanks.

During all phases of operations, all crew members work on deck, excluding the Master, who operates the winches from the bridge console (see Image 2). Deckhands execute connecting and disconnecting of gear elements, as well as control of wire movement direction and tension.

The Master executes vessel manoeuvres (turns) to optimise trawl wire strains and directions during operations with the fishing gear.

All crew members are experienced seafarers and fishermen, citizens of Latvia and Lithuania. The vessel's documentation is in the Lithuanian language, with some exemptions in English, i.e. certificates issued by the Polish Maritime Administration. The factual working language onboard is Russian.

4.2. Safety and working instructions manuals onboard of TOVE

There is a set of safety documents onboard of TOVE in the Lithuanian language. The set includes work risk assessments, general safety instructions and supplementary manuals that can be generalised by content as follows: be careful, be aware of moving parts, slippery surfaces, loops and wires, and do not endanger yourself. The set of documentation does not include working instructions for fishing gear. There are no written standards for operating fishing gear onboard of the fishing vessel TOVE.

4.3. Statements of crew members

After consolidating all statements provided by crew members regarding the circumstances of the accident, there is an ambiguity about two general actions/events before and during the accident:

A. Whether the port-side turn of the vessel, with the gear attached to the starboard side, was operationally justified? (see Image 2)

B. Whether the location of the injured crew member on deck, between the bulwark and the wire (see Image 3), was a normal working location during normal fishing gear operations?

5. Conclusions

A. Circumstances of the accident: On 19 May 2024, at approximately 20:15 (LT), the Lithuanian-flagged fishing vessel TOVE was engaged in routine pelagic trawl fishing operations in the Latvian EEZ, at about 20 nautical miles from the port of Ventspils.

B. Accident: During the trawl hauling operation, while the vessel was executing a port-side turn, significant dynamic tension developed in the trawl wire due to the weight of the catch. As a result, the movement of the wire pressed a deckhand between the trawl wire and the vessel's stern bulwark.

C. Location and duties of the injured crew member: At the time of the accident, the injured crew member was positioned on the stern deck on the port side, performing tasks related to disconnecting and connecting trawl gear components, including monitoring and regulating the direction and tension of the wire. This position was located within a hazardous zone between a moving wire under load and fixed ship structures.

D. Nature of injuries: Because of the accident, the crew member sustained serious chest trauma, which required prolonged medical treatment and rehabilitation. Medical evacuation was carried out by a Lithuanian SAR helicopter, which transported the injured crew member to Ventspils Hospital.

E. Organisational and safety aspects: No written, vessel-specific working instructions for fishing gear operations were available onboard TOVE. The existing safety documentation was of a general nature and did not provide detailed guidance on hazardous zones or safe working practices during fishing operations.

Following a review of the facts and narrative surrounding the serious injury onboard the fishing vessel TOVE on 19 May 2024, the investigation has reached the following determination: to suspend the investigation due to the factual absence of the vessel within reachable range, long-lasting health problems of the primary persons involved, combined with a demonstrated unwillingness to cooperate with the TAIIB inquiries. The lack of accessible

testimonies and active engagement from key witnesses prevents further ascertainment of the causes and circumstances necessary to meet the investigation's objectives.

6. Safety Recommendations

Though the TAIIB suspends the investigation, **generic safety recommendations** are issued to the shipowner AB “BANGINIS”:

- 1. Enhance the Safety Management System (SMS):** Develop and implement comprehensive, ship-specific working instructions for all phases of fishing gear operations, including launching, winching, and catch retrieval.
- 2. Conduct targeted risk assessments:** Establish formal risk assessments that specifically address the “danger zones” on deck, such as areas between moving wires under dynamic pressure and the vessel's bulwark.
- 3. Improve operational communication:** Formalize communication protocols between the Master (operating winches from the bridge) and deckhands to ensure situational awareness during vessel manoeuvres that increase wire tension.
- 4. Standardize documentation language:** Ensure that all safety manuals and critical working instructions are provided in a language fully understood by the crew to eliminate ambiguity during high-risk operations.

TAIIB lead investigator of Marine accident and incident investigation department: CPT Aleksandrs Pavlovics (signed)